

Juntos Newsletter January 2015

A Request

Since this is the very first Juntos Newsletter, my first request is for feedback from the readers. What sections to expand / delete, what subject matters are of interest, what questions you have about Juntos. You can email me at eva.echenberg@gmail.com

Our Students

The focus today is on the RJ group and some of the students who were present on Wednesday, December 17. The selection was totally random and in the future, after many more interviews, we will be able to analyze who our students are. I will continue to do interviews and if you have questions you would like me to ask, I would be grateful for the help.

RJ is a suburb of Cuernavaca, and quite typically is filled with gullies and steep hills. The students meet in a multipurpose small community centre that serves as library, health centre and, of course, for the Juntos computer classes. It is a one story building and has a large cemented play area.

Maria Feliciano López Ramírez is 16 years old and has been attending computer classes for three years already. She is not the only one in the family who comes; both her 14 year old sister, Sandra, and her mother are regular attendees as well. Because she has been coming for such a long time, she has learned Word, Excel, and Power Point but now she normally comes in order to do her homework. She is currently in her first semester of *Preparatoria*. (In Mexico, after grade 6, there are three years of middle school, followed by three years of high school, called *Preparatoria*. Most schools run double shifts, one group studies in the morning, the second in the afternoon. They are normally considered two different schools and have different names. The current government has a plan in place to get rid of the shifts and allow students to study more hours, but the implementation has just started).

Since the school holidays for Maria's *Preparatoria* will last until February, her plan is to learn Photoshop in the next two months. Maria describes herself as an excellent student, who gets good grades. One of the special things she has learned recently is sign language, just a little bit, but she found it a great deal of fun. She was able to sign a large number of animals for this interviewer. She has Internet access at home on her phone, but no printer, so she likes to come to Juntos in order complete her assignments and print them.

Maria's mother, who was not present, knows as much about computers as she does and often helps her with her homework. In fact, sometimes when Maria is very tired, her mother tells her to go to bed and when she gets up in the morning, she will see that her mother has completed her assignments for her.

The next student, **Josefa** Herreo Galves, could not be more different. She is such a computer buff that her brother has given her a new nickname, Abuelita Cibernética, Cyberspace Granny.

She is a sixty-three year old homemaker who is a diabetic and needs insulin several times a day. Because of her health problems, she often has medical appointments that interfere with coming to Juntos, but she tries to come as often as possible. To the question about what prompted her to learn, she had several answers. First, when she dealt with her taxes, there were figures to check and those could only be checked on line. She explained that all tax related payments and issues are only on the government website and even when she went in person, they would direct her to a computer right there to answer her questions. Often they were curt with her and she was embarrassed not to be able to do this for herself and decided she needed to learn. The second reason was to check her telephone bill since she felt there were discrepancies and finally, she has a twelve year old grandson who lives in the United States, in Las Vegas, and he sometimes writes her in English.

After learning Word, the program she has found most useful is Google Translate because she can now copy and paste her grandson's messages and not be forced to ask someone else to translate for her.

Coming to Juntos is not enough, so she often visits the local internet café, which she says is not expensive and where she checks her Facebook account. She insisted she was not all that good on the computer because her other grandson, the one who lives near her, had to set up the account for her.

Rosita Sánchez Hernández is a shy, twelve year old, grade six student who has been attending Juntos for about one year. In that space of time she has learned Word, Excel, Power Point and is now working on Movie Maker. To date she has made two videos, one about her family and a second about animals in danger of extinction. The next video she plans to make is one called "My Life". In addition, she wants to learn Photoshop.

Since they do not have Internet at home, she likes going to the Internet café and chat with her friends on line. She wishes she would have her own phone but thinks that the chances of getting one for Christmas are slim.

Rosita lives very near the RJ site and discovered the Juntos computer programme simply by walking in. She rushed back home to ask her mother's permission to attend and when it was granted, immediately came back. She normally attends with her best friend, although Rosita comes much more often. Her best friend lives further away and on Saturdays sells bread with her father.

Rosita's sister **Dolores** Sánchez Hernández was the biggest surprise of the day. Two years older and a lot more self-confident, she immediately told me she spoke English, a fact her little sister had not revealed. When I switched languages, I did not hear the heavily accented English that is usual, but a native speaker.

Both Rosita and Dolores are American citizens, born in Houston. Her parents divorced and her two older brothers, fifteen and seventeen years old, stayed in Houston with their dad and the two girls came to Mexico with their mother. Although they have been in the Cuernavaca area for about three years now, their mother has been trying to get back to the United States. At one point the mother was in a relationship with an older man who promised to sponsor her so she, the only one who was not legal, could go back to the United States with her daughters. The plan went ahead and when their mother was at the Ciudad Juarez border crossing, the man changed his mind saying he was angry. When he relented, she was already in another relationship, so she now plans to wait four years until her eldest son is 21 and can sponsor her.

Meanwhile Dolores, who explained that she and Rosita only speak English to each other in order not to forget, is trying to decide whether to go back to Houston. She thinks it would be best for her to finish middle school in Mexico and then attend high school in Houston where she would live with her father and two brothers.

Her middle school has computers and printers so she uses her time at Juntos to learn software programmes. To date she has learned Word, Excel and Power Point. The last few months she has been using her time to do her homework at Juntos.

Our Teachers

Juntos has five full time tutors, one of them is Cecilia. Petite, cute and always dressed up, Cecilia started as a Juntos student and ended up as a Juntos teacher. Her full name is **Cecilia Gomez Ruiz**. She cannot remember if she has been with Juntos for seven or eight years, insisting that time flies and she cannot believe she has been working for such a long time.

She was quite old when she started learning about computers, eighteen, but said she liked it from the very beginning. Her neighbours were attending the computer classes, then under the Vamos umbrella, and that is where she began.

When Cecilia finished middle school, she chose a technical rather than an academic route and took a three year course called Fashion Technique. Looking back on her studies, she feels that the course she took had been designed to prepare workers for textile factory work. There are some *maquila* factories in the Cuernavaca area, but most are closer to the border. These are the famous plants that have left Canada and the United States to relocate in places where salaries are much lower. Cecilia had hoped to find employment in the clothing industry, such as in design but that was impossible to find.

Cecilia obviously impressed lead teacher Zerafina, who much to Cecilia's surprise asked if she wanted to work with them. At the beginning she felt she really did not know enough, but over the years she has learned all the software programmes very well and above all, she is not shy any more.

Cecilia feels that she has the confidence of the students for they often tell her about their worries and concerns and she tries her best to listen and help. According to her, many people go to work only because they have to and it is just a job they have to do, but she feels that at Juntos she is really making a contribution. In the last few years she has been able to suggest additions or new ways to learn different programmes and even has created new materials.

Several years ago she started going to school in the evenings and on the weekends to complete the *Preparatoria* level since the degree she received was technical. She is still three credits short and feels a little guilty that she has not completed her studies yet.

Juntos Facts and Figures

Number of full time tutors: 5

Number of sites: 9

Number of times at each site: 2 per week

Number of hours at each site: 3 hours, 2 real teaching hours

Number of students: approximately 500 a week (we will have better figures in the new year)

Website: <http://www.juntos-together.ca/> (Donations on the site are now active)

